

Bessie Tidland and Camas grew up together

By JON LARSON

Sitting chatting with Bessie Tidland a while and you'll learn history lives best in those who lived through it.

At 93, she is one of the community's last links with its past. She is the wife of the late Edward Tidland, inventor of the ingenious air-expanding shaft used in winding and unwinding operations in paper and other industries, and the mother of three children, one of whom is the president of the international company bearing the family name.

Bessie Tidland's mother and father, Sarah and Albert Davis, came to the community, then called LaCamas, from Wisconsin in 1889.

Bessie was born Oct. 21, 1891, and has outlived her two brothers, Wesley and Charles. Dirt streets were dusty in the summer, muddy in the winter and every housewife baked her own bread because a bakery hadn't opened yet.

The community had no morticians, so when someone died, a friend or relative sat up, keeping the face of the deceased covered with a rag soaked in salt peter to keep it from turning dark. They were buried in the Camas Cemetery.

Her church

Much of her life has centered around the Camas First Baptist Church, which is celebrating its centennial this year. She was baptized in Lackamas Lake at age 12.

The town of LaCamas was founded in 1883, and several churches began in the following years. The Presbyterians built their first church in 1886 and shared it with Methodists and Baptists — which prompted Presbyterian minister George Mitchell to suggest its congregation might be called MethoBaptistians.

Early Baptists tried to buy a church of their own but couldn't make the payments. So they continued to meet in the Presbyterian church, private homes and in the shop of Aeneas MacMaster, LaCamas' first general store. Eventually, they found a building of their own.

Bessie remembers the MacMaster store as holding most of the necessities people needed, including candy of all kinds.

"And when we paid our bill at the end of the month, we'd always get a little bag of candy."

When she was eight, Bessie saw the famous Yacolt burn, a tremendous fire which started in Bonneville and charred a 15-mile-wide swath to Mount St. Helens 35 miles away. Its destruction also came near the Davis family home northeast of Lackamas Lake.

"We moved out on a little farm above the lake in 1900. That's just before McKinley was shot during that time, and then there was the big fire, the Yacolt burn, that came through. That's why we moved off, because the fire came and my father was fighting it and he inhaled so much smoke that it made him sick. He almost died," she said.

"My brother was 14, I guess, and he and my mother sat up all night and kept laying wet gunny sacks on the roof of the big barn to keep it from burning."

Tidland Heights

So how did Tidland Heights in Camas acquire its name?

"It's just really funny. My mother-in-law owned all that up there and she'd sell it out in lots. So this lady bought a lot, or maybe two, I don't know. So, anyway, she went to the courthouse and had her deed recorded and the man that waited on her asked, 'Where do you live in Camas?' She said, 'I live on Tidland Heights.' The Tidlands had nothing to do with it."

She and her husband Edward Tidland, whose father arrived in LaCamas the year after it was founded, had grown up together and were married in her parent's home Sept. 2, 1911, after a four-year courtship.

Her husband began work at the mill bag factory but by the time their three children Edward, Barbara and Charles were born, he was a master mechanic at the mill and the supervisor of many divisions.

Eventually he was transferred to the Crown Zellerbach Portland office and began traveling as a consulting engineer.

"He just had that ability, wherever there were problems, he could straighten them out," she said.

He worked 44 years for the company until his retirement in 1953. He died in 1956.

Edward Tidland gained a reputation as a mechanical genius and problem-solver through his work for Crown. He generated many ideas about how to improve machinery, but patented only one, the air-expanding shaft.

His son, Bob, president of the Tidland Corporation, said the air shaft's revolutionary design made it a welcome replacement for the heavier, inefficient shafts it competed against when it first appeared.

Air shafts support rolls of paper and other products during winding and unwinding operations. Old-style shafts were inserted into the core of the roll, then expanded by mechanical means for a firm hold.

The Tidland air shaft works by air pressure. Air is forced into a thick rubber bladder inside the shaft, which pushes out metal leaves which grip the inside of the roll core. The shafts are much lighter than their mechanical counterparts and have a longer lifespan.

The Tidland name continues in the company Edward Tidland founded in Jan. 1, 1951. Bob and his wife Roberta have three sons; Dale, who is the company's advertising manager; Tom, an engineer; and Ted, the sales manager for Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Oklahoma and Arkansas.

Bessie and Edward's daughter Barbara was married to Ralph Wilson, who died while fighting in World War II. They had one child, Barbara later married Elmar Gist.

The Tidland's oldest son, Chet, and his wife Mae are retired and live in Burns, Ore.

Bessie Tidland is the grandmother of seven: Barbara Ann and Tom Gist, Judy Mae Ferguson, Doug Wilson and Dale, Tom and Ted Tidland.

She has nine great-grandchildren.



BESSIE TIDLAND—Wife of Tidland Corporation founder Edward H. Tidland, will be 94 this October and has lived in this community all her life. Born in 1891, eight years after

the founding of LaCamas, the original name of Camas, she has witnessed many changes in her lifetime.

Photos by
Harold Collett



HARD WORK—(Above) Bessie Tidland, although being 93 years old still believes in hard work and remains active in gardening and quilt making.

YOUNG BESSIE—(Right) Bessie Tidland, born and raised in Camas, displays a photograph taken when she was six years old.

